

**The American Veteran
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Pension Building

SERVICE PENSIONS BEGAN IN 1832, BUT THE ROOT TO
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STEM FROM THE CIVIL WAR.
THERE WERE NEARLY 4 MILLION UNION TROOPS AND THE PENSION
BUILDING WAS CONSTRUCTED TO SERVE THEM.

HERE'S NAOMI.

>>Reporter: FROM A DISTANCE IT LOOKS JUST LIKE ANOTHER
RED BRICK BUILDING IN WASHINGTON, D.C., BUT ITS
CRAFTSMANSHIP AND HISTORY ARE DETAILED.

MANY FOUGHT IN THE CIVIL WAR.

ON THE UNION SIDE, THOSE WHO SURVIVED ARE ENTITLED TO
FEDERAL PENSIONS AND SO ARE THE WIDOWS, PARENTS AND
CHILDREN OF THOSE WHO DIED IN THE WAR.

A DISTINGUISHED CIVIL WAR VETERAN DESIGNED THE BUILDING.
GENERAL MONTGOMERY CUNNINGHAM.

HE WAS QUARTERMASTER GENERAL OF THE UNION DURING THE WAR
AND A NOTED ARCHITECT ENGINEER WHO SUPERVISED THE
CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAPITOL THERE.

THIS BUILDING TOOK MORE THAN 15 MILLION BRICKS.

BUT AS YOU NEAR THE ENTRANCE YOU SEE HOW MUCH MORE THERE
IS TO IT.

HE WANTED PEOPLE TO REMEMBER THE TROOPS, THE MEN AND THE
BOYS WHO FOUGHT SO VALIANTLY, SO HE HAD THEM
IMMORTALIZED IN A FREEZE THAT CIRCLED THE BUILDING.

THE GUNS OF ARTILLERY UNITS.

INFANTRY MARCHING.

THE SUPPLY WAGON AND THE WOUNDED WITH THEIR CRUTCHES AND BANDAGES, ALL REMINDING US OF THEIR COMMON EFFORT AND THEIR INDIVIDUAL SACRIFICE.

PASS UNDER THE FREEZE TO ENTER THE BUILDING AND YOU ARE TRANSPORTED INTO AN ORNATE, YET OPEN SPACE DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO PROVIDE LIGHT AND AIR TO THE 1500 CLERKS WORKING WITHIN.

WHAT YOU SEE HERE IS NEARLY AS LONG AS A FOOTBALL FIELD. THE COLUMNS SUPPORTING THE SKYLIGHTS ARE AMONG THE TALLEST IN THE WORLD.

19TH AND EARLIEST 20TH CENTURY PRESIDENT USED THE HALL FOR THEIR INAUGURAL BALL.

THE PENSION BUREAU MOVED OUT AND THE CENTRAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE MOVED IN.

DESKS FILLED THE GREAT HALL AND THE FOUNTAIN WAS SHUT DOWN SO THAT RECORDS COULD BE STORED ON TOP OF IT.

OVER THE DECADES THE BUILDING DETERIORATED.

IT WAS MORE THAN 65 YEARS BEFORE IT WAS SAVED FROM DEMOLITION AND THE INAUGURAL BALLS RESUMED.

TODAY IT'S THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL BEAUTY.

>> YOU CAN VISIT THE OLD PENSION BUREAU AT 4TH AND S STREETS NORTHWEST IN WASHINGTON, D.C..

ADMISSION IS FREE.

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